

Sense of Place in a Gentrifying East Austin Neighborhood

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I intend to submit a copy of my Polymathic Scholars thesis to the Texas ScholarWorks (TSW) Repository. For more information on the TSW, please visit <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/>.

## **Sense of Place in a Gentrifying East Austin Neighborhood**

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Date

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## **Abstract**

Sense of place is the relationship a person or a group of people have with a place. A strong sense of place can promote strong individual and group identities, positive emotions, and have psychological benefits. This study investigates how sense of place in East Austin is changing and how this perception of change differs between residents. Sense of place in American neighborhoods is deteriorating due to the displacement of people and changes in infrastructure. Neighborhoods in East Austin have experienced significant changes over the past two decades due to gentrification, and as a result people may experience a changing sense of place. Sense of place in neighborhoods was examined through a literature review, interviews, and hand-drawn maps produced by the interview participants. The literature review analyzes and provides a framework for sense of place and neighborhood perceptions. Residents from an East Austin drew maps of their neighborhoods and were interviewed. This study finds that there is a conflicting sense of place for some people who feel like they belong in their neighborhood but are also not meant to be there and a sense of loss due to the many changes that have occurred in the neighborhood. A better understanding of sense of place can help urban planners, designers, and city officials create a stronger sense of place in changing areas, such as East Austin.

## Introduction

Everything we do in life happens in a place. We walk through places, to get to places, to be in places. We don't like being confined to just one place; that is viewed as a prison. The ability to go from place to place, differentiating our uses and experiences of different places, is a key part of the human experience. One feature of places is that they do not create the same feelings for everyone. The same exact house can be the center for love for one person and another person's center of stress and trauma. What differentiates the same physical place for two people is their respective senses of place.

Sense of place is the experiential relationship a person has between themselves and a location. Sense of place is similar to how you perceive the personality of a friend. How you perceive a friend's personality is determined by the friend's actions and also your own background and personality. If your sister is loud and extroverted, you may be more predisposed to like loud and extroverted people while others, unaccustomed to that type of person, would find such a personality annoying.

Sense of place can be created in all kinds of physical environments, such as a child's bedroom. A person's experiences and the physical environment in that room create a sense of place for the person who lives in that room. The sense of place is distinct from other family members' sense of place of that room. A child's sibling, who has different memories in the room and who would spend less time in there, would have a different sense of place in that room than the child who sleeps in that room.

Sense of place also exists in areas of larger scales, such as a street, neighborhood, town, or city. The feeling of home is a distinct sense of place phenomena most people experience on

these different scales of the city. The final street you have to go down before coming to your house may create the feeling of home before you arrive to your house. A city can also have a sense of place that makes it feel like home to a person. What makes these places feel like home to people is the certain relationship and familiarity one has with that place or the layering of many memories in that area.

Strong sense of place experiences, such as feeling a sense of home, is an important aspect to having quality urban experiences that allow for attachment to place and help engender meaningful experiences. When a person can't feel comfortable anywhere and they feel like they don't belong in a place, they cannot relax and enjoy themselves within that place. This inability to feel like they belong in a place can happen to people who are displaced from their home. However, sometimes people don't have to be displaced for them to feel like the place they call their home has changed. For people in gentrifying neighborhoods, their physical environments are changing around them as they stay in the same location.

Many American neighborhoods near downtowns are currently experiencing rapid changes in their sense of place through gentrification. Neighborhoods near the urban core are experiencing gentrification because of an increased demand to live near the amenities downtowns offer (Richardson et.al., 2019). Gentrification is stereotypically viewed as when an area with a bunch of rundown buildings is suddenly filled with houses with modern architecture and a plethora of coffee shops with locally sourced, ethically produced, rainforest saving coffee beans for \$15 a bag. Gentrification is also often marked by a shift from predominantly ethnic minority populations to a majority, non-Hispanic white population. The rapid change in the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of a neighborhood can cause a change in the sense of place for people who live in the neighborhood.



To study the people's sense of place in a gentrifying neighborhood, I looked to Austin, Texas. Austin has been notorious for its boom in population and businesses in the last few decades as the "Live Music Capital of the World" and has become known for its bar districts, tacos, parks, and festivals, such as South by Southwest. The increased amount of businesses, restaurants, and shops in Austin's downtown has caused an increased demand to live near downtown. Therefore, the historically segregated and ethnic minority neighborhoods directly east of downtown Austin are undergoing through the process of gentrification. Studying the people who live in east Austin neighborhoods allows for a study of how a shifting sense of place affects the residents in a gentrifying neighborhood.

Neighborhoods are a reflection of the local society, and the ability to choose how they are formed is often determined and shaped by the stakeholders, people who have some interest or "stake", with economic power to shape the urban fabric how they desire. Part of the injustice present in a gentrifying neighborhood is that those with power are usually people who are not from the neighborhood while those without power are neighborhood residents who consider that area their home. Allowing all stakeholders to engage in this process is paramount since their own neighborhood environment greatly impacts them.

In the following sections I first address the literature on sense of place. I then discuss my original qualitative study based off of eight interviews with people living in an East Austin neighborhood, the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. Through these interviews, I create a foundation for understanding the sense of place of the neighborhood. Investigating individuals' sense of place in specific neighborhoods, such as the rapidly changing East Austin neighborhoods where this study was conducted, may help guide future work on reconciling the various stakeholders' conflicting sense of place in an urban environment.

# **Sense of Place**

## **Defining sense of place**

Sense of place describes the relationship between a person and a place; it arises from individuals interacting with a place. It is tied deeply not only to the physical infrastructure of a place but also to the people, culture, and time period that place exists in. When a group of people have overlapping accounts of their perceived sense of place, this leads to a collective sense of place. The characteristics and attributes of a location affect what this sense of place is for people but sense of place is inherently a relationship between a perceiver and a place. Defining place and sense of place has been a challenge tackled by many disciplines but has been mostly defined by people working in the fields of geography, philosophy, urban planning, architecture, sociology, and anthropology (Long, 2010). Sense of place has no set or agreed upon definition and reviewing how the term has been used in different professions helps elucidate the meaning of sense of place and gives rise to the common attributes assigned to sense of place.

## ***Geography***

The study of sense of place was first conducted by geographers (Leiwika, 2011, pg.223). One of the most prominent writers on sense of place is the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan (1977) viewed sense of place as memories, perceptions, activities, beliefs, and emotions through which a person experiences place. Tuan argues that a strong exemplifier of sense of place is the home, which acts as a place for shelter and recovery. Tuan takes on an idealist conception of the home in which people have an emotional bond to their home due to the long periods of time spent creating memories in the home and due to the protection from the outside world the physical elements the home provides. This emotional bond and memories together create a strong sense of

place in a person's home. Tuan also illustrates sense of place on the cultural level. A culture's "awareness of other settlements and rivalry with them significantly enhance the feeling of uniqueness and of identity" (1977, pg.166). Thus, people in one group feel a strong sense of place in their territory when they compare themselves with other groups in nearby areas because it makes them aware of what makes their location unique.

According to the geographer Edward Relph, sense of place at its core is "the ability to recognize different places and different identities of a place" (1976, pg.63). In his more nuanced understanding of sense of place, he distinguishes sense of place as either authentic or inauthentic and either conscious or unconscious. An unselfconscious, authentic sense of place is the place experience of a person who feels like they belong to the place. This sensation is something a person knows without thinking about it. A selfconscious sense of place requires a person "to open one's senses" and compare a given place to other places they have been in (pg.66). Authenticity of selfconscious sense of place increases when people are not affected by "theoretical or intellectual preconceptions" (pg.66). Relph thinks every individual will experience a different sense of place because it is primarily influenced "by the intention and experiences of the observer", which are unique to each person (pg.66). Thus, people consciously experiencing a place will each have a different sense of place of a given location.

### ***Philosophy***

In philosophy, sense of place has been defined in the context of its relation to both space and place. Space is the physical environment that we and all objects inhabit. According to the philosopher Edward Casey (2001), one of the most renowned current philosophers on place, space has no identifiable features to it; it is the background on which places exist. Space in this definition has a meaning as the connection between places and thus acts as an intermediary

between locations. Spaces connect us between different places and are physically embodied in structures such as roads, train tracks, and foot paths that are direct connections between places. Place is a relationship between “self, body, and landscape” (Casey, 2001, pg.683). All three of the components of place interact and play off each other to create a sense of place in the self, which is the experiential component of place. Casey claims that society has stopped emphasizing places and instead is only creating spaces. He thinks that this has detrimental effects to both people’s psyche and personal identity as people cannot associate themselves with a set place.

### ***Urban Planning and Architecture***

In his 1960 book *The Image of the City*, urban planner and MIT professor Kevin Lynch aimed to determine how to design cities that were easier to navigate and understand. In this seminal work, Lynch was able to gain an understanding of both the individual and the collective “image of the city” – people’s perception of the city as compared to the reality of the city. Lynch detailed where cities have gone wrong in tarnishing or hurting their image, thus cataloging the ways cities are making it harder for citizens to navigate, understand, and enjoy their urban space. Taking Lynch’s advice and creating urban forms that lack disruptions and have increased navigational clarity can help create increased, coherent, senses of place for the entire city.

Architects’ studies have taken an even more detail oriented approach than Lynch in cataloging the tremendous number of specific visual elements that contribute to sense of place. In *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour outline the importance of symbolism in cities in creating meaning. The book was written about an investigation of the urban form of Las Vegas, which was viewed as having extremely poor city planning with extensive urban sprawl and parking lots. “The strip” is the main defining feature of Las Vegas that exemplifies this sprawl and the

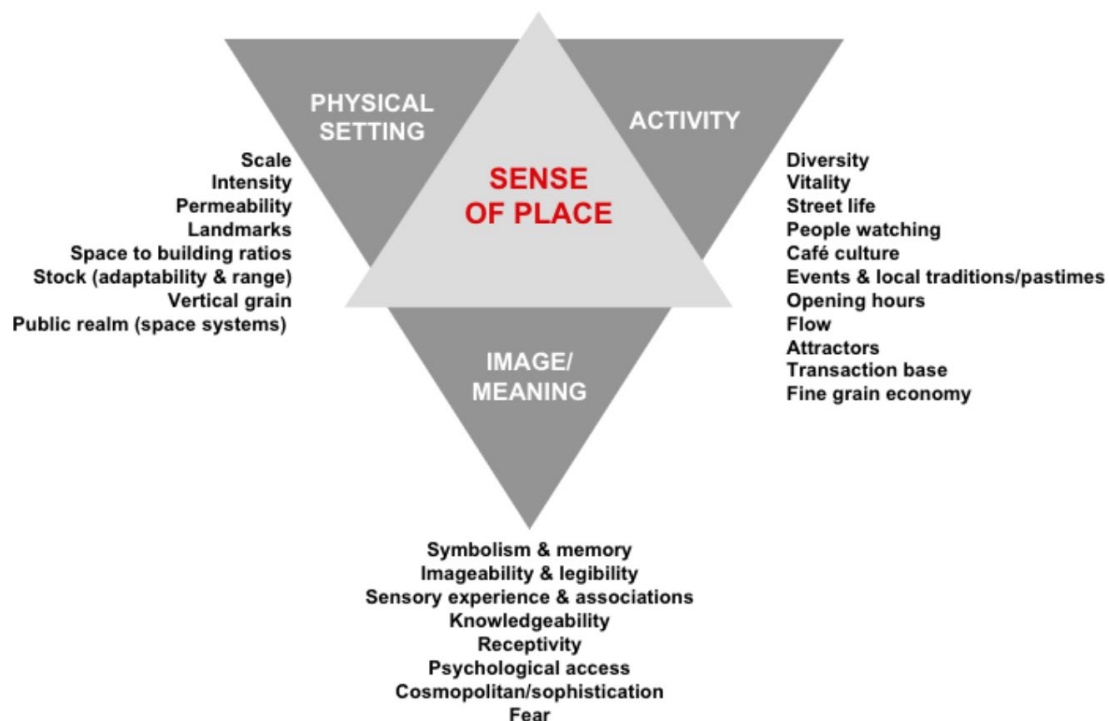
strange mash-up of different architectural styles and themes used in Las Vegas ranging from Italian to Moroccan to Hawaiian to French. All of these styles from around the globe mixed and mashed together into this one area in the middle of the desert. The authors identified the different forms, imagery, signs, and symbols that pervaded the Las Vegas landscape of appropriated signs. The book was a major critique of Modern architecture for its lack of symbology and therefore its lack of meaning. Through this book, Venturi et al. were able to document what features were specifically leading to the unique sense of place of Las Vegas that has made it one of the most iconic and unmistakable cities in the world. Thus, these authors would say that sense of place is strengthened from the use of symbolism in the city.

In *A Pattern Language: Towns, Building, Construction* (1977) architects Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein outline different solutions to architectural and urban problems for the everyday person trying to improve their local community. They call their solutions “patterns” because they are based on successful building and societal choices that have been repeated in many cultures and settings. Alexander et al. emphasize the importance of making positive and meaningful spaces for people to occupy and each pattern either responds to some human need or gives guidance on how to enhance human relationships. The authors intentionally keep the patterns and solutions general so an individual can still cater the solution they choose to use to their specific location. *A Pattern Language* gives guides on what can be done to make a location have a positive and strong sense of place for non-architects and non-designers in different communities. As a person or community implements their own design preference the place itself will become just as unique as the people who designed it. This book shows that different senses of place can be created from the same physical design elements but

part of what will make a sense of place unique is the combination of these elements people choose to construct.

*The Image of the City*, *Learning from Las Vegas*, and *A Pattern Language* all approach the city by dissecting it into parts, highlighting how those parts affect people, and explaining how to improve the parts of the city in order to create a stronger sense of place in the city and improve the city as a whole. While the literature on sense of place in urban planning and architecture mainly focuses on both the study of urban form and how to practically improve urban environments that can be used to foster sense of place, some urban planners have taken abstract approach in defining sense of place. Inspired by the work of Relph, urban planner John Montgomery (1998) divided the factors that influence sense of place into three major categories: physical setting, activity, and image/meaning (Diagram 1).

**Diagram 1:** Sense of place, a redrawn version of Montgomery's work (Carmona, 2003)



This diagram helps highlight both the objective and subjective nature of sense of place. The objective components are the physical setting and activity while the subjective component is the image/meaning. Sense of place is nestled between objective world and subjective experience, therefore, it requires both the objective knowledge of an environment and the subjective experiences of those in that environment. The work of geographers, philosophers, urban planners, architects, and other fields all contribute to understanding the dynamic and complex nature of sense of place.

## **Implications of Sense of Place**

Having a strong sense of place is not only an aesthetic goal but has important implications in people's lives. In a literature review, Lewika (2011) found that sense of place has implications for personal and cultural identities and to feelings of displacement. A strong sense of place can help to strengthen and improve personal and cultural identity. On the other hand, a weak sense of place can negatively impact personal and cultural identities and create a sense of displacement. There have also been studies on how sense of place can affect people's mental health. These implications of sense of place highlight the importance of having places that engender sense of place.

## **Personal and Cultural Identity**

Science teaches us that we are a product of nature and nurture. A key part of this dynamic that influences each individual is their environment. Our environments and how we perceive them translates to the sense of place of a location and this perception itself influences who we are as a person. Thus, there is deep tie between environment and identity. One of the reasons disciplines aim to understand sense of place is because there is this inextricable link between

sense of place and both personal and cultural identity (Casey, 1993). To clarify, personal identity in this context it is an individual's conception of their personality and their personal narrative.

Cultural identities are a product of a community's memory and its places (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). Groups of people can choose to use places to reflect the identity of their culture. Hoelscher and Alderman believe this is especially exemplified in how we utilize historically contentious spaces. They highlight the example of Robben Island in South Africa, a location used historically for lepers and for prisoners, most famously Nelson Mandela. When the island stopped functioning as a prison, there was debate over whether the island should be turned into a leisure resort, nature preserve, or historical site. When the choice was made to turn it into a historical site, this showed the importance of wanting to remember the injustices that were wrought among people during apartheid. This choice further shapes the cultural identity of South Africa as a place wanting to remember and respect its painful history. Place is also important in the fight for political identity, with people protesting in public spaces to show their domain over that area. Through their literature review Hoelscher and Alderman also found that "many scholars... have come to see memory as a social activity, as an expression and active binding force of group identity" (2004, pg. 348). This collective memory is also imbued into the spaces and their uses. For example, a town square that is used for a market place would have the memories of the food and trade activities there. In Austin's Zilker Parks, what is primarily a general-purpose park is overlaid with community memories of the use of space for special events such as the Austin City Limits music festival and for their Christmas light show, the Trail of Lights.

This connection of people and place is extremely prominent in tribal groups which have their cultural stories and history tied into their land (Casey, 1993; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977).



Tribal groups' memories that are tied to the physical landscape where the history of their people has occurred for hundreds, if not thousands of years. When some Native American tribes have been displaced from their historical homeland, they report losing their cultural memory with the loss of place (Casey, 1993). Thus, with the loss of this land they lose part of their culture itself.

If how sense of place affects personal and cultural identity is better understood, then places can be manipulated in order to help create rich experiences and memories. These memories do not all have to be positive. Negative memories are just as important to sustain in order to recognize different groups and their historical experiences in a given place, as exemplified at Robben Island. The goal is to help engender sense of place and attachment to place that is inclusive of the breadth of human experiences. Creating places that allow for salient memories and activities for people is conducive to helping produce more meaning and belonging in individuals' lives.

## **Displacement**

Some authors' work on sense of place, such as Relph (1976), is contextualized around the claim that there is a sense of personal and societal displacement in modern day society caused by urbanization and the design of our urban environments. Displacement is marked by a lack of feeling that a person belongs in a certain place. People want to live in places that they feel they belong in. However, some relationships in urban environments often do not engender feelings of belonging. This is not due to the general physical structure, but due to these places not being conducive to an experiential relationship with certain perceivers that can support a sense of place.

The reason for this lack of belonging varies between social and economic groups in the city. Professionals in high paying sectors that experience frequent job relocation can be required

to move for upward mobility or better job opportunities. As these people move from place to place, they end of treating their home as a temporary investment and don't live in a place long enough to created rooted place attachments. Working class people living near the urban core may have to relocate due to increased property tax or rent, thus severing their place attachments in the process. People who experience chronic homelessness lack belonging in the city because they have no shelter of their own they can claim as the place they belong.

While these kinds of relationships to the city have existed for a long time, the phenomena of people getting moved from their places has accelerated due to current business practices, higher demands to live in urban cores, and gentrification. This displacement is not only a physical environment displacement but an internal, psychological displacement which causes a psychological form of "homelessness" (Mugerauer, 1994). Mugerauer thinks that this feeling of 'homelessness' takes out an important aspect of living which is being connected and attached to a place.

## **Mental Health**

Through more recent studies, sense of place has been found to be related to mental health. In one study, the authors used responses from the "Hamilton Household Quality of Life Survey" to gain data from participants (N = 1,002) that were from three different neighborhoods in Hamilton, Ontario (Williams & Kitchen, 2012, pg.260). Each neighborhood consisted of residents from different socioeconomic levels: low, mixed, and high socioeconomic status. They found that residents of the high socioeconomic status neighborhood had the highest sense of place associated with their neighborhood. People who reported high sense of place in their neighborhood tended to be "single-detached homes, retired residents and those living in their neighborhood for more than 10 years" and often had better "self-perceived mental health"

(pg.257). While work on sense of place as related to mental health is limited, more work can be done to provide quantitative evidence for this field.

## **Austin Neighborhoods, In Context**

In the above background section I established sense of place and its implications. Next, I aim to contextualize the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood, the study area my research participants live in. I approach this by explaining the history and evolution of East Austin, the area of Austin directly east of I-35 that the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is in and the sense of place of the city of Austin as a whole.

### **History of Austin's Segregation**

Austin's segregation was motivated by the racist goal to keep minorities to specific areas of the city, away from white people. As of the 1880s, the African-American population was dispersed throughout Austin (Zehr, 2015). In 1928, an Austin zoning plan was made with a set "negro district" on the east side of Austin that designated where all public services, such as schools and parks, could be accessed by African-Americans. This caused many African-Americans to move into East Austin so that they could easily access these essential public services instead of having to travel across town to get to them.

The next major step in the segregation of the African-American population was in 1935 when the Home Owners Land Corporations, a federal agency, officially determined African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods as areas of low economic opportunity in a process known as "redlining" (Zehr, 2015). Redlining made it extremely difficult to get any federally backed housing mortgages and other economic resources or funding into these neighborhoods. Homes are a major source of lifetime accumulation of wealth for Americans and mortgages are an

essential tool for all but the very wealthy to buy a home. The redlining of these neighborhoods meant that it was extremely difficult for local residents to purchase homes and start the process of gaining wealth. Additionally, the lack of city resources provided in these redlined neighborhoods meant that the public services offered in these areas were underfunded. The east-west divide of Austin was further reinforced with the construction of Interstate Highway 35 (I-35), which created a physical barrier between the predominately African-American and Hispanic east side of Austin and the predominately White west side of Austin (Zehr, 2015).

The east side of Austin, an area directly east of downtown and east of I-35, has experienced gentrification for the past few decades (Way et al., 2018) partially due to the increased demand to be near downtown Austin. The neighborhoods in East Austin are in high demand because they allow for easy access to downtown but for cheaper prices than living directly in downtown or in the historically rich and white west Austin. East Austin has been changing with a rapidly increasing number of new mid-rise developments and an ever increasing number of yoga studios, coffee shops, restaurants, and bars. The changing neighborhoods in East Austin are following a national trend of changing cities throughout the United States.

### **Changing American Cities**

After the economic recession of the 1970s, the American economy experienced an economic restructuring that led to a decrease in manufacturing jobs because manufacturing jobs were hired out overseas for cheaper labor (Hackworth, 2007). This led to an increase of business and administrative jobs in the United States to manage this overseas manufacturing. This economic restructuring led to infrastructural changes in cities. As the number of downtown factories and warehouses decreased due to overseas production, the number of high rises and office buildings began to increase as downtowns became centers of office work. The shift from

manufacturing to business jobs has led to an increased density of American downtowns and more businesses continuously want to locate in downtowns because of the high number of activities and restaurants in downtowns that cater to these business workers. While Austin was not primarily a manufacturing the city, Austin also experienced the trend of other cities and had a revitalization of its downtown through city and private investments.

### **Austin's Sense of Place**

Austin is known for being the “Live Music Capital of the World” and has also become a tech hub with branches of companies such as Google, Apple, and Facebook. In the 2000s, local Austinites began to notice changes to the city and one result of this was that t-shirts, posters, and bumper stickers that all proclaimed “Keep Austin Weird” proliferated. Joshua Long has tackled defining the sense of place in Austin, Texas in his book *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance*. He argues that slogan “Keep Austin Weird” grew to embody Austin’s sense of place. The “Keep Austin Weird” slogan was originally created by a local Austin radio host who sold merchandise: t-shirts, bumper stickers, and posters with this slogan pasted on it (Long, 2010). The slogan was later adopted by small businesses as a buy local campaign. Through interviews Long found that people varied in how much they identified this slogan with representing Austin and also found that people had varying definitions of what made Austin weird. However, this slogan was able to unite the different perceptions of sense of place into a collective sense of place.

According to Long, the sense of Austin as a ‘weird city’ stems from events and places such as Eeyore’s Birthday Party, Hippie Hollow Park, and the Cathedral of Junk (2010, pg.16-18). Eeyore’s Birthday Party is an annual celebration open to the public that features a live donkey, food, alcohol, drugs, and people in minimal clothing, all gathering together to celebrate

Eeyore the donkey's birthday. Hippie Hollow Park known just as "Hippie Hollow" is a nude beach which, I have been told, usually does feature some older hippies. The Cathedral of Junk is a monumental art project made entirely from trash someone created in their backyard. People also site other Austinites who they find strange as contributing to the weirdness of Austin and view the overall "simple geographic perceptions of place" collectively as weird (Long, 2010, pg.16-19).

While there is this unifying, undercurrent of weird, Long found that the differing visions of Austin's future, preserving the city as it is or allowing the city to transform, changed whether people viewed Austin's identity as a weird city something to be preserved or gotten rid of entirely (2010, pg. 127). The "Keep Austin Weird" slogan was a way of communicating wanting to keep the sense of place in Austin the same even as the city changed (Long, 2010, pg.151). Despite the future these different Austinites hoped for in their city, the city has commercialized with small businesses closing frequently and making way for national chains.

Long chose to delve into this study because "in examining sense of place and the attachment to urban cultural landscapes, we may be able to arrive at a more comprehensive view of what makes cities desirable place to live, work, and play" (2010, pg.152). People have been attracted to Austin for its music scene, food options, and healthy lifestyle. The ability to foster these qualities can increase Austin's sense of place while the deterioration of these attributes changes Austin's sense of place.

Long's research focused on the state of Austin as of 2007 and 2008, when he conducted his interviews. Over the decade since the book has been written the shape of Austin has continued to change as it has faced a continual increase of housing, restaurants, and population in

Austin. Additionally, Long's scope of research was on the entire city of Austin which helped give an overall identity and sense of place to the entire city.

### **East Austin Neighborhoods**

While understanding the identity of the city as a whole is important, there is also a need to understand the smaller scale areas within the city that impact people's everyday lives.

Neighborhoods are one of the most immediate urban experience that people have around their home, thus it is an area they constantly interact with. Additionally, the scale of neighborhoods are large enough that people can have a variety of experiences and activities in them. Therefore, I chose to study sense of place in a neighborhood because of the large amount of time people spend in their neighborhood and the scale of neighborhoods, which allow for familiarity of physical features and depth of experience in the area.

The specific neighborhood I chose to study in East Austin is the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood because it has undergone and is still undergoing gentrification. I determined the official boundaries the neighborhood based off of the City of Austin's Community Registry and included a map of the neighborhood for reference (Map 1). In 2018, the University of Texas School of Law and the Community and Regional Planning department published a study, *Uprooted*, outlining the gentrifying neighborhoods in Austin and the displacement of residents in these areas. According to this study the people in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood are "vulnerable" to displacement and the neighborhoods themselves are in the "late" to "dynamic" stages of gentrification (Way et al., 2018). Thus, gentrification is not only coming but has already come. Therefore, it can be expected that the neighborhood has been significantly changed over the past two decades. The neighborhood has also experienced a housing market change in that the home values are either continuously increasing or have already significantly

increased (Way et al., 2018). Additionally, according to the City of Austin's evaluation of census data, between 2000 and 2010 the change in the white percentage of the population increased by 10 to over 15 percentage points in different areas of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood (Demographic Maps). The East Cesar Chavez neighborhood, which is historically Hispanic, saw a change from the majority of the block groups consisting of a population of 80% or more people of Hispanic Origin in 2000 to most block groups being 60% to 80% of Hispanic Origin in 2010 (Demographic Maps). Both Way et al (2018) and the demographic data all act as signs that East Cesar Chavez is gentrifying.

Change both in life and in neighborhoods is inevitable and should not be stopped. However, the type and dynamics of this change should be evaluated to determine whether this change is for the advancement or the detriment of the people living in a neighborhood. Determining if sense of place is being fostered, destroyed, or shifted in a gentrifying neighborhood can elucidate how these neighborhoods are impacting the residents. I conducted a study of sense of place in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood in order to create an understanding of sense of place and its impact in gentrifying neighborhoods.



Map 1: East Cesar Chavez neighborhood (City of Austin Community Registry Map Finder)



1223 - East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Association

Source: Development Services Department of the City of Austin  
Date Created: Monday, May 11, 2020

1" = 737'

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## Methodology

In order to study sense of place I took two approaches: mapping and interviews. Both have historically been used by urban planners (Lynch, 1960), cultural geographers (Lilley, 2000), and psychologists (Kitchin & Freundschuhping, 2000) to study the relationship between place and people. Below I outline the specific methods I used in my study to have participants both map their neighborhood and answer questions about it.

### Mapping

To study urban environments, researchers have participants map out their urban environment as they can recall it from memory. These are supposed to reflect the “mental map” or “cognitive map” people have of their environment (Kitchin & Freundschuhping, 2000). Participants label the most important features in their given neighborhood or city and illustrate how they spatially relate to each other.

Mapping was popularized for systematic research purposes by the urban planner and MIT professor Kevin Lynch. In his seminal book *The Image of the City*, Lynch breaks down the features of the city into five categories: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (1960). Lynch defines paths as areas that people walk or drive along in the city to move through the city. The most common type of paths are streets. Edges are the “boundaries between two kinds of areas” (pg. 62). Edges can be penetrable, such as a road that separates two parts of town, or impenetrable, such as a lake. The degree of penetrability along an edge can vary, such as an interstate highway which is penetrable only in very specific locations and usually only by car. Districts are “relatively large city areas which the observer can mentally go inside of, and which have some common character” (pg. 66). One of the most pronounced types of districts are

Chinatowns in cities such as San Francisco and New York City, which stand out to people for their Chinese-inspired architecture and prevalence of signs in Chinese. Nodes are relatively small locations that are “typically either junctions of paths, or concentrations of some characteristic” that often are decision points for a person to possibly change direction (pg. 72). A street intersection of two major roads is one of the most common forms of a node. A plaza can also act as a node, such as Republic Square in downtown Austin, which is a common decision point for people getting on and off of busses. By decision point I mean a location in which people often have to pick what direction they want to go next, which usually means they pick between different paths. Landmarks are “point references” which observers use to orient themselves in the city (pg. 78). The Texas State Capitol is a prominent landmark in downtown Austin that can help orient people to their location.

Lynch determined these five categories of city features by having people from Los Angeles, Boston, and New Jersey draw maps of the city they lived in to determine what features were most salient to people in each city (Lynch, 1960). The drawn maps showed that certain kinds of city design can lead to confusion in people’s comprehension of the city’s layout and that certain other features and areas were accurately understood by people. People’s ability to comprehend and navigate through their city were determined by the organization and relationship of paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks to each other. While Lynch mainly used this research as a means to understand how people navigate through their city, mapping can help not only give insight into wayfinding but also elucidates social differences between different groups of people in the same city, town, or neighborhood.

In one study utilizing mapping, children from the same community were asked to draw maps of their neighborhood (Gillespie, 2010). The groups of children were divided into two

groups, those who were Amish and those children who were not Amish. These two groups of children consistently drew different features from the neighborhood and the maps reflected each group's "cultural values" (pg.25). The Amish children put more drawing detail on their homes and frequently included both their church and school but did not include features such as their neighbors' homes. Non-Amish children often drew "recreational elements" which could reflect a value on "leisure pursuits" and neighbors, as these children had a broader sense of their neighbors as part of their community than the Amish children did (pg.25-26). Thus, this showed that perceptions of place, and sense of place, can differ between cultural groups in the same physical location, such as the differing sense of place different urban stakeholders can have.

Gillespie's study provided evidence that children's cognitive maps of the same neighborhood are affected by the cultures they are a part of. Each group exhibits different features that contribute to strong senses of place (pg.25-26). Identifying common features that stick in peoples' minds can allow for future incorporation of similar features in neighborhoods in order to foster sense of place.

For my study I decided to use the technique of mapping to better understand what features of the environment were most prominent in people's minds. Knowing which features are more prominent to each person helps identify what physical features contribute to their sense of place of the neighborhood. Additionally, identifying what these physical features allows for a community sense of place to begin to be determined.

In this study, each participant was given a pencil and a piece of paper and was asked to respond to the prompt: "I would like you to draw a map of your neighborhood. Pretend I am a new visitor to your neighborhood, draw what I would see while walking around. This can include your home, streets, restaurants, or your favorite places to go. Feel free to label any

buildings or locations that you feel are important.” Each participant then drew what they considered to be their neighborhood and the features it in the neighborhood that were most salient to them. Participants were given no time limit and usually took between 7-25 minutes to draw their maps. All participants that participated in mapping (n=8) also participated in interviews.

## **Interviews**

Sense of place has often been studied using interviews. In Long’s study of Austin’s sense of place (2010), he conducted open-ended interviews, which were semi-structured and allowed for flexibility in the range of questions he would ask his participants. I chose to do structured interviews with a set list of questions for every participant. I decided to use structured questions because I interviewed a small sample population from the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood (n=8) and I wanted to ensure that I could compare set responses across participants.

A methodology for doing interviews on a subjective, qualitative subject such as sense of place is to get to “sufficient redundancy” in responses such that the interviews begin to have repetitive overlap in answers (Long, 2010). More responses to the same overlapping concepts indicates a pattern or theme that people are experiencing in a place. Due to the limit of time and resources, this study did not meet this criteria of “sufficient redundancy” in its responses. However, some patterns among respondents did emerge. This research does not offer a definite, solidified sense of place for the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood but is the beginning of an understanding its sense of place that would need to be detailed with more research. These individual accounts are meant to exemplify what sense of place is occurring for these specific individuals in the neighborhood and begin to understand the community sense of place.

All interviews were conducted within the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood in order to have participants in the context they are recalling information about. These locations varied depending on what each participant preferred and included coffee shops, a local library, and participant's homes.

A full list of the interview questions can be found in the Appendix A. There were five main themes in the types of questions I asked: places, change, memories, neighbors, and community. I choose these themes because they are each factors that can contribute to sense of place. During the interview, people would refer back to their map to either add other features they hadn't included before or further emphasize features with darker lines or additional labels.

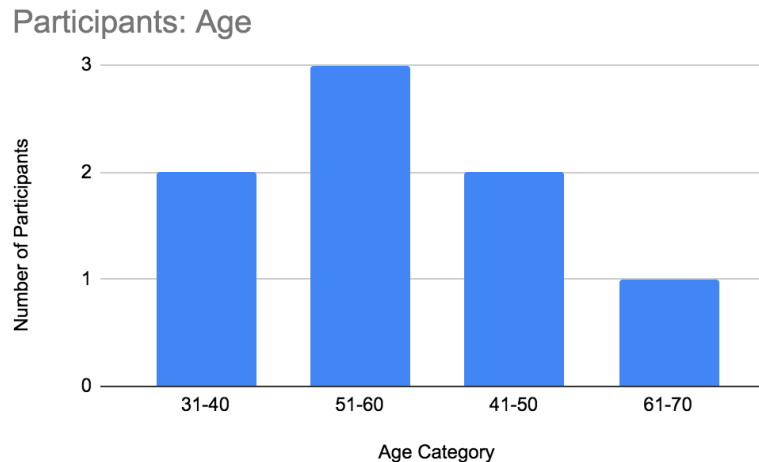
## **Results and Discussion**

In the background section, I outlined factors that contribute to sense of place, which Montgomery (1998) broke down into three categories: image/meaning, activity, and physical setting. Through my interviews, I was able to see how these often abstracted means of definition sense of place manifested for people in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. Additionally in the background section I outlined the implications of sense of place on personal and cultural identity and how a lack of sense of place can lead to feelings of displacement. The most common implication that came up in the interviews was cultural identity, since this neighborhoods' culture is being challenged in the face of gentrification. In the following section, I first describe the image/meaning and physical setting that exists in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood, which was primarily determined through mapping. Then I elaborate on what the image/meaning and activity are in the neighborhood primarily determined from the interviews.

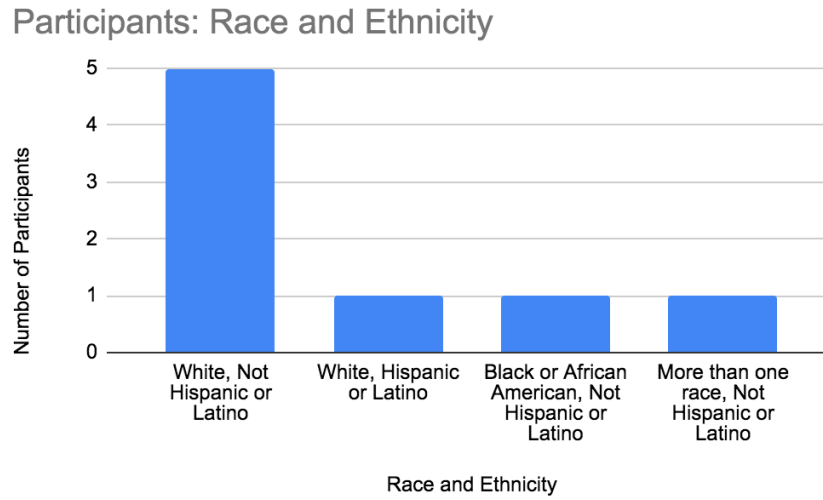
## East Cesar Chavez Participants

Participants consisted of a convenience sample and were found from outreach to East Cesar Chavez organizations, the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood association, and friends of these members in their extended network. Out of the 8 participants, 3 were female and 5 were male. All participants were between the ages of 31 and 70 (Graph 1). Most of the interviewees were White and not of Hispanic or Latino descent (Graph 2). Participants had lived in Austin for a median of 20.25 years and an average of 26.5 years. Participants had lived in the neighborhood for a median of 13.25 years and an average of 15.44 years. Both of these measures were for non-consecutive years of residency, as some people lived in Austin or the neighborhood, moved, and came back.

Graph 1: Participants Ages



Graph 2: Participants Race and Ethnicity



### Mapping East Cesar Chavez neighborhood

In reviewing the maps participants drew, I looked for the five features of the city that Kevin Lynch distinguishes in *The Image of the City*: landmarks, nodes, paths, edges, and districts (see Table 2). I also added a category for future construction because I was not expecting to have people draw future spaces that have not yet opened or are incomplete in construction so I thought they were notable feature to quantify.

Table 1: Frequency of Features in East Cesar Chavez Mapping

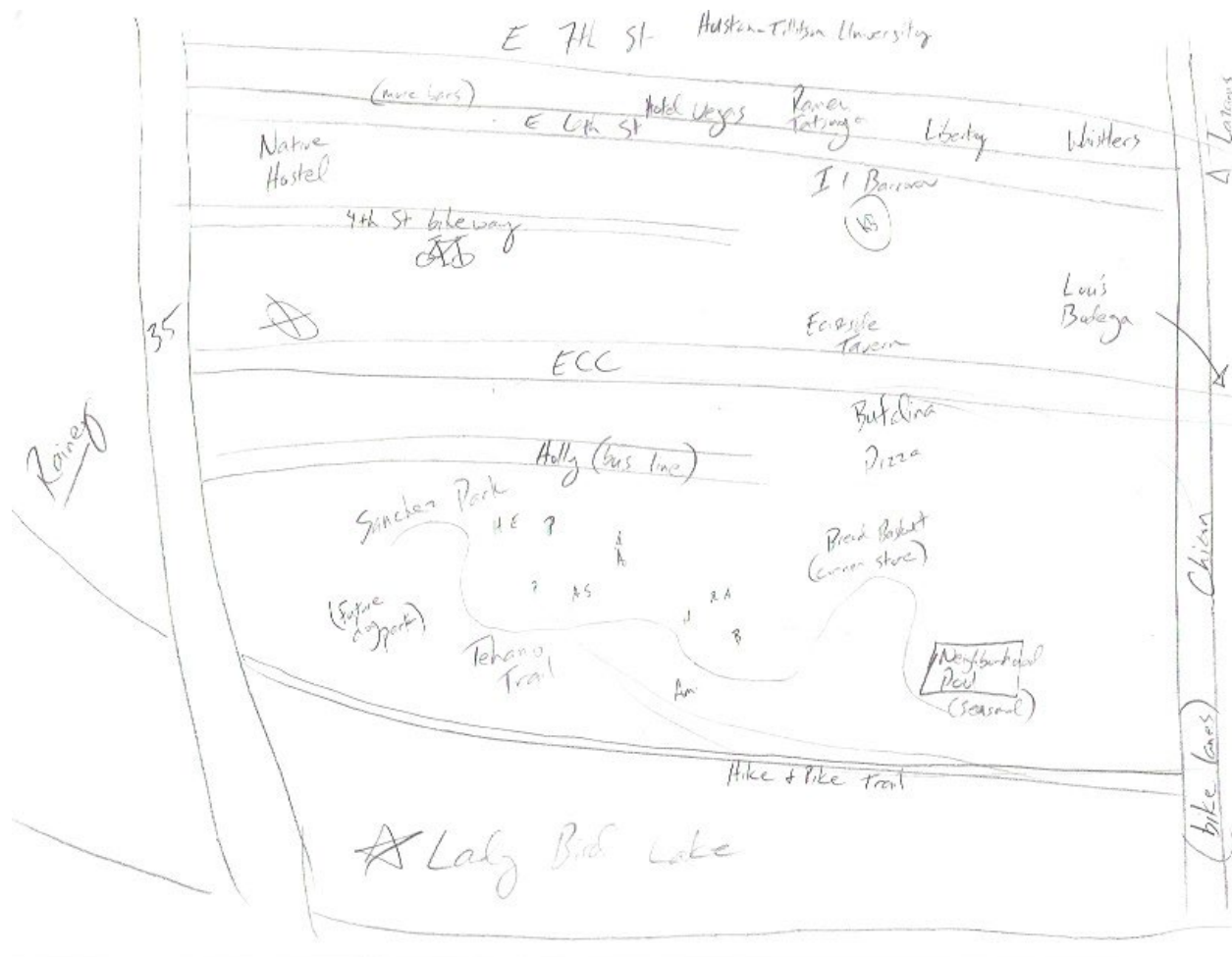
Category	Instances	Proportion of participants who drew them
Landmarks	104	8/8
Nodes	21	8/8
Paths	104	8/8
Edges	18	8/8
Districts	14	8/8
Future Construction	4	4/8

On the maps there were large swaths of blank space between streets which some participants (n= 3) defined as all residential housing. East Cesar Chavez is a dense residential

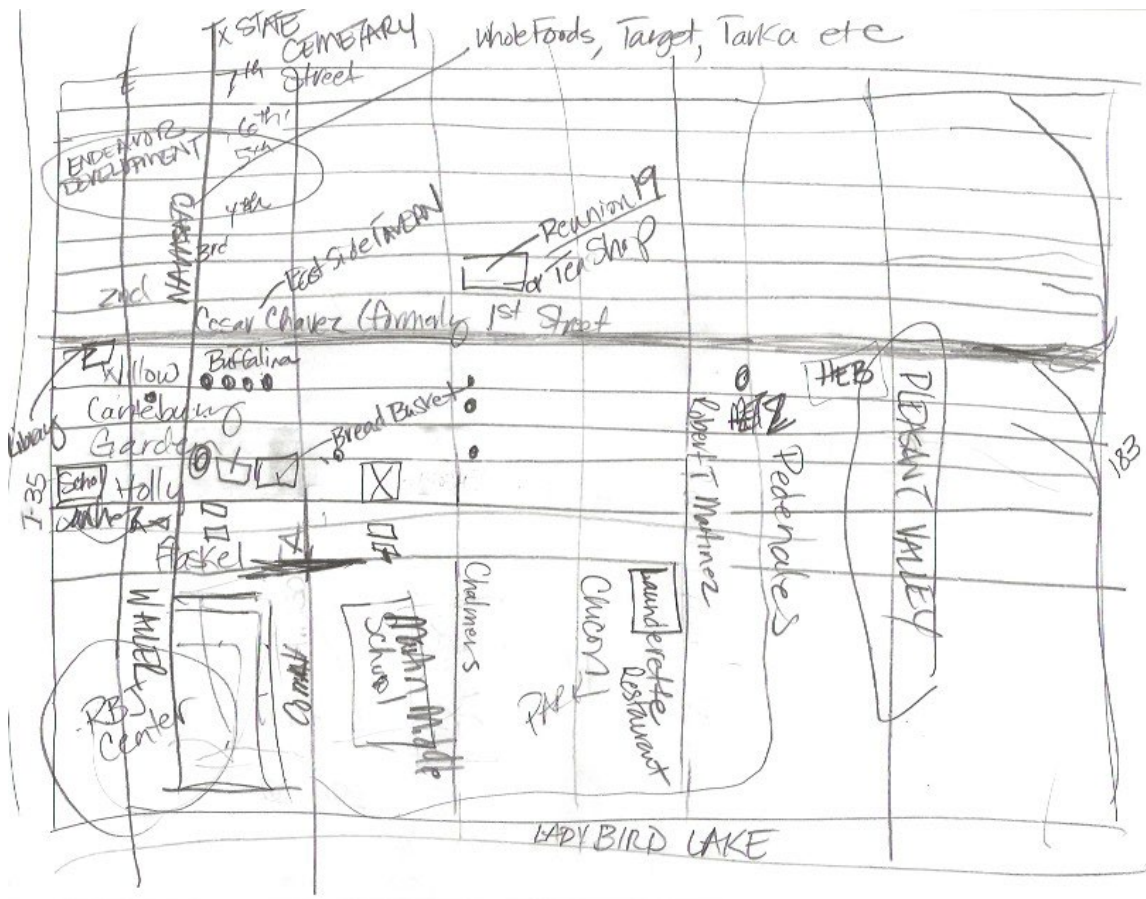


neighborhood with few empty lots so assuming most of the white space is residential homes or possibly other services the interviewees did not frequent is accurate to the urban environment. Houses were otherwise marked by the initials of neighbors, dots, house stick figures, or a star. Below are two map participants drew of the neighborhood (Map 2 and 3).

Map 2: Example of participant map of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood



Map 3: Example of participant map of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood



## Landmarks

Due to the strong edge and boundary that I-35 creates, the downtown acts as a large visual component of East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. The skyscrapers have been incorporated into the sense of place of the neighborhood rather than the downtown actually being a part of the neighborhood or a defined part of it. Only one participant noted a specific skyscraper, the Fairmont hotel, as a landmark for them, it is a wide and tall skyscraper and was notable for the person because they could see it easily from their home. Other participants that noted the visual aspect of the downtown viewed the skyscrapers as a collective landmark. I imagine the

downtown functions in a similar way to how Mount Rainer functions in Seattle, part of the city character but in reality over 50 miles to the actual mountain.

Smaller scale landmarks also dotted the neighborhood. Houses of friends acted as landmarks and were often located in close proximity to the participant's home. The East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood is not strictly residential and is filled with a plethora of restaurants, bars, and food trucks which also acted as landmarks. Since the people I interviewed were all above the age of 31, they also had the ability to go out and visit all of these places without being limited by parental figures and could legally go to all of the bars and therefore were not limited in any way as a child or teenager in the neighborhood may have been. Participants emphasized how much they enjoyed the food culture on in their neighborhood and restaurants were one of the most frequent features on the maps.

The mix of uses in the neighborhood creates for very diverse opportunities of places to go and activities to do and this is part of its appeal for people who want to buy property within the neighborhood. Thus, the mixture of places is both part of the character of the neighborhood and adds to the sense of place as a place with many accessible resources in reach. Residents have the feeling of many options of places to go to within the neighborhood and enjoy this feature of the neighborhood, even if in actuality many residents still choose to make their regular grocery purchases and do some of their socializing outside of the boundaries of the neighborhood.

## **Nodes**

The predominate nodes were located on the western boundary of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood at streets that could be accessed by either exit ramps off of I-35, frontage roads onto I-35, or were streets that ran under I-35 and allowed for access to the west side of Austin. The nodes most often drawn were East Cesar Chavez Street, Holly Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and 7<sup>th</sup>

Street. Within the neighborhood itself, East Cesar Chavez Street between I-35 and Chicon Street was a major “core”, which Lynch views as a type of node that is the “the intense foci of districts” (1960, pg.48). East Cesar Chavez Street has a mixture of restaurants, business, and homes along it and has a large activity of both pedestrian and cars. The buildings are a mix of single story repurposed homes and newer, box-shaped two story buildings. Thus, the street acts as the epitome of both the mixed use in the neighborhood and the changing nature of the neighborhood.

### **Paths**

Paths were the most prevalent feature of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. This was unsurprising because Lynch found that paths are usually the most common feature in mapping cities (1960, pg. 49). The grid pattern of the neighborhood allows for an ease of accuracy in locating the streets that are parallel to each other. The paths that had the most salient character for participants were the east-west streets because only some of these streets would allow for access under I-35 to downtown and were also the main concentrations for restaurants, shops, and bars, most notably on East Cesar Chavez Street and East 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The Hike and Bike, a trail that runs along Lady Bird Lake, was also a path often included since it was a main source of recreation for residents.

### **Edges**

The edges that were consistently agreed upon by residents were I-35 and Lady Bird Lake and they acted as boundaries for the neighborhood. These were strong edges in the neighborhood with Lady Bird Lake acting as an impermeable edge and I-35 acting as mostly impermeable but permeable only at certain point. The permeability of I-35 was also limited by specific modes of transportation, usually only by car but also with some points also having safe bike and walking accessibility. I think that these points of permeability have the potential of being improved upon,

such as two participants indicated with the 4<sup>th</sup> street bike path, which was only been accessible by car or foot (for the more daring) before its construction. I think that more connections would allow for a greater integration with the downtown in the community's sense of place rather than the stark division that currently exists with the presence of I-35.

People's perceptions of the boundaries of their neighborhoods have been shown to vary from official neighborhood boundaries or census tracts (Coulton et al., 2013). The East Cesar Chavez neighborhood was no exception to this. Notably the neighborhood lacks a strong northern or eastern boundaries because they are weaker edges. This lack of strong edges made the perception of the boundary of the neighborhood differ between participants. People usually defined the northern boundary as either East 6<sup>th</sup> Street or East 7<sup>th</sup> Street because of the change in the architecture and activity in that area while a few people who lived south of East Cesar Chavez Street defined East Cesar Chavez street as the boundary of their neighborhood. While the eastern boundary of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is Chicon Street according to the City of Austin (Map 1), the boundary was most often identified as either Pleasant Valley Road or U.S. Route 183 (usually referred to as Highway 183). These boundaries of the neighborhood would affectively double or triple the size of the neighborhood. For people who defined Pleasant Valley as the eastern boundary they included the entire Holly neighborhood, directly east of East Cesar Chavez, in the definition of their neighborhood as a consequence of this boundary. Those who defined the eastern boundary as Highway 183 included all of the Holly neighborhood and the southern part of the Govalle neighborhood in the definition of their neighborhood. This expansion of the eastern boundary of the neighborhood seemed mostly due to the consistency of housing typology within this extended area. This indicates that there is a potential to have interpersonal community efforts between these neighborhoods if they also reciprocate the feeling

that they are all part of one, south-east Austin neighborhood that has similar character and possible values.

## **Districts**

The districts included on maps consisted of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood itself (n=8), Austin's downtown (n=2), Rainy Street (n=3), and a district at the northern end of the main neighborhood (n=2). Rainy Street is a residential neighborhood turned bar district south of the main Austin downtown. It is one of three of the main bar districts in Austin. "Dirty 6<sup>th</sup> Street" and East 6<sup>th</sup> Street are the other two main bar districts in the city. The proximity of both East 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Rainy made their inclusion on maps unsurprising since they are very popular places for both visitors and Austinites to go. The district at the northern end of the main neighborhood around East 6<sup>th</sup> Street was referred to by one participant as "California" because of its prevalence of modern architecture. This area was usually the indicator of either an boundary to the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood and the beginning of another neighborhood.

Some participants drew downtown Austin on their map of the neighborhood, even though none of the participants claimed the downtown to be part of the neighborhood itself. The neighborhood is directly adjacent to Austin's downtown and the proximity of the neighborhood to the downtown came up as both one of the best and worse attributes of the neighborhood. The proximity to downtown was one of its best because it allowed access to downtown amenities and attractions, for example, a location some mentioned was the Austin Central Library (n= 3). The downtown also acted as a huge detriment because its proximity spurred developers to construct on the east side and make the east side a continuation of downtown. The dual nature of the proximity to downtown creates a tension in resident's minds with the presence of the downtown,

it is both part of what makes their neighborhood a good place to be in but also is a root of the pain and concern surrounding the neighborhood changing out of their control.

### **Future Construction**

One attribute that came up on maps that I was not expecting was the inclusion of future construction. A new Whole Foods and Target were expected to open on 4<sup>th</sup> street in the coming months and were included on some participants maps. Additionally, a new dog park that has yet to be completed was also drawn on one participant's map. A new Google building is supposed to go up in the Saltillo plaza area, near the 4<sup>th</sup> street Whole Foods and Target construction, and was included also on one participant's map. These structures are not complete or open so they are not places that the participants had ever used or interacted with. I did not find anywhere in the literature people including future or incomplete infrastructure on maps but I speculate that participants felt the need to include these attributes because they are physical manifestations of the constant change that is part of what defines the landscape of their neighborhood. Even if a new development does not fully exist or function yet the occurrence of new construction and change is part of the sense of place in a neighborhood that is experiencing the rapid changes that East Cesar Chavez is currently experiencing. A participant who grew up the neighborhood, reflecting on how her neighborhood has changed, found it shocking that such big name stores would be on the east side "it's just like wow, who knew Target would ever be in this neighborhood". This neighborhood that was once lacking investment due to redlining and segregation is now experiencing the force of national chains entering their neighborhood.

The lack of inclusion of future construction in the sense of place literature and maps could be due to either this feature being unique to rapidly changing neighborhoods or because it is not a feature researchers are looking for and thus noting in their findings. It could also not be

drawn on people's maps in other studies due to the study scale of other mapping studies such as smaller scale studies like Gillespie (2010) covering areas that are less likely to have future construction sites while larger scale studies like Lynch (1960) that look at the entire city are so large that future construction seems less important to participants than the physical features of the city that are more established features of the physical landscape. Additional mapping studies in gentrifying neighborhoods could help elucidate the cause for the lack of inclusion of future construction sites in sense of place studies and maps.

## **Gentrification**

During the interviews, the major theme that came up for participants was gentrification. I never used the word 'gentrification' in any of my questions but in each interview the word gentrification came up with the interviewees. It is a central part of the current character of the neighborhood. The East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is experiencing an exceptionally rapid change of its visual characteristics, culture, and people. Not only are the permanent residents changing but the people who visit the neighborhood are changing. More groups of young and white are going to the east side to eat, drink, and recreate now than did 20 years ago.

The East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is a historically Hispanic neighborhood, thus I aimed to interview someone who is Hispanic and from the neighborhood. I was only able to interview one person who is Hispanic and grew up in the neighborhood. The interviewee has lived in Austin her whole life and first left the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood when she was 18 to move closer to the university she went to, which is in Austin. Her parents continued to live in their home in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood until they passed away and the interviewee inherited the house and currently lives in it. Thus, the participant had a deep familiarity with the neighborhood and many personal memories and connections to it. Additionally, she had



experienced and witnessed the changes that the neighborhood had undergone since her childhood. She viewed the neighborhood as having had many improvements that she enjoys but also as having lost some of its positive attributes.

The neighborhood I live in, before gentrification came along and it was mostly Mexicans, mostly illegal Mexicans. The houses were in pretty bad shape. A lot of them were dilapidated. A lot of poor people. A lot of alcohol. So it was your typical poor neighborhood. Gentrification has given this whole area a facelift. So even though I look out my front door and I see what I think is hideous, (I don't like the architecture with the sharp angles and all of that I just really don't like that) you don't see grass anymore, you don't see children playing. They're mostly couples and as far as I know the two across the street don't have any children and the lady next door is 60 or 70 years old. I don't have children. I miss the sound of children playing because when I was growing up it was all families and each family probably had 5 to 6 kids and we all played together. Just nostalgic for the old days. Now it's just very quiet.

The lack of children in the neighborhood was also noted by three other participants. This observation of participants is backed by the fact that between 2000 and 2010, the population of people under 18 in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood decreased at some of the highest rates of the city (Demographic Maps). This reflected the shift in the type of people who are moving to East Cesar Chavez, people who are adults without children. The loss of families and lack of new children to East Cesar Chavez is substantiated on an institutional scale as schools on the East Austin are being shut down by the Austin Independent School District (AISD) based on the claim that these schools are underpopulated and/or underperforming (Taboada, 2019). This has caused extreme tension for AISD as these school closures are located in historically underfunded

African-American and Hispanic communities thus has caused local opposition under the main accusation that AISD was being racist in their decision (Salazar, 2020). One of the four schools closing in summer 2020, Metz Elementary, is in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood (Salazar, 2020). A lack of diversity in age ranges in a neighborhood does impact the neighborhood as a place that seems to cater to adults as the plethora of restaurants and bars are most appealing to the childless adults who have the time and means to use these amenities.

One resident who has lived in the neighborhood for 16 years, when I asked her if any places in the neighborhood changed recently she said,

All of them. It bares almost no resemblance to the neighborhood I moved into. Everything from the house across the street. When I moved in there was this kind of dilapidated house with apparently no fixed occupants. There was a rotating cast of characters who came through the place and it was eventually, demolished. And now there is an interesting looking sort of in town McMansiony looking place there. That's typical of the neighborhood, houses get scraped and they get replaced by much larger new ones.

The change in the physical infrastructure and characteristics of the homes and their architecture is striking for residents who are used to the small homes, mainly constructed in the early 1900s. This causes a shift in the look of the neighborhood with an obvious contrast between houses that are either almost a century old or those that are built within the last 10 years. The new, modern architecture of the houses is also partnered with a change in the residents who live in them who participants said are usually rich and white.

Most participants mentioned the presence of Airbnbs in their neighborhood which are people renting out these new, modern homes to tourists. These transient visitors seemed to frustrate interviewees since they didn't "respect" the neighborhood. The presence of these

constant non-neighbors seem to be a part of the sense of place of the neighborhood now as the popularity of activities in East Austin continue to increase.

A key part of sense of place is the uniqueness of that place to a person. Participants seemed to find their neighborhood different from different areas. Participants often cited that the Hispanic culture as a key part of what makes their neighborhood unique but there was also the recognition that this culture was disappearing. One participant I interviewed was a white women who had lived in the neighborhood for 13 years. While she reportedly felt like she belonged in the neighborhood, when I asked her if she felt she belonged, the thought she was part of the gentrification would creep into her answers as caveats to her sense of belonging. She said,

The Latino culture... is so precious...they love family. When I used to ride my bike down every evening I could smell different houses cooking dinner. It was just like a very more homey wholesome. Now it is more yuppies riding everywhere on scooters, parties at the Airbnbs, and the yogurt shops. So you are losing some of that fabulous ethnicity but I am also a part of that. I am part of that gentrification but it also makes you very sad.

Other longer term participants had similar feelings about their place in the neighborhood. There was this tug of both the sense of belonging in the neighborhood but also an acknowledgement that they were foreigners to this land that was previously that of Hispanic people. Thus, these people's sense of place contained the conflicting emotions of belonging and home but also not being native to the place.

A common way participants would bring up the prevalence of Hispanic culture was through mentioning old and current restaurants in the neighborhood, mainly taco places. One participant said that when they first moved to the neighborhood "you couldn't turn the corner without a taco hitting you in the face". The prevalence of cheap, delicious tacos seems to be a

fond association people had with the Hispanic community in the neighborhood. This culture is increasingly disappearing and has now been replaced by a more complex and diverse form of interests from developers, investors, and the new residents shaping the culture of East Austin.

## **Community**

What the residents do have control over is the relationships with neighbors that they form, and many seemed to find a lot of joy in their neighbors. Many residents of East Cesar Chavez felt they had a well formed community that is well connected and deeply meaningful for the residents. Community was felt in a variety of ways, some people had lifelong friendships with neighbors and viewed them as family while others felt community with their neighbors by waving to them as they sat on their front porch.

A few specific blocks of East Cesar Chavez neighborhood had a deeply connected community. Through the interviews I found out that there is a community organizer who lives in the area and has really brought one part of the neighborhood together. He was kind of a mysterious figure because when I asked several people what he did professionally as a community organizer no one was quite sure. I never got to meet with this person but my understanding was that they had a very large impact on the neighborhood. He spearheaded an all-evening block party that involved blocking off a part of a street for a dance floor and dinner for around a hundred neighbors in East Cesar Chavez. Thus, this part of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood seemed like it did not have the community a normal neighborhood would have but that it has a community that was a strong byproduct of specific, purposeful effort by people who want to have a connected community and a physical space that facilitates these community connections.

## **Length of Residency and Sense of Place**

Since participants had lived in the neighborhood for such different lengths of time, I wanted to gain an understanding of how length of residency affected participant's sense of place. I considered participants in three categories based on Jenks natural breaks, which is a process of grouping data with like values. The people that I interviewed had lived in the neighborhood for a range of 2 years to 35 years. The first category were two participants who had been in the neighborhood for 2 and 3 years respectively. The second category were those who had lived in the neighborhood for a longer time but less than one generation which consisted of four participants and ranged from 9.5 to 16 years of residency in the neighborhood. The last group were two participants who had been in the neighborhood for longer than a generation, they had lived in the neighborhood for 31 and 35 years respectively. The most prominent contrast was between those who were newest to the neighborhood compared to the other two groups and I detail the specifics of this finding below.

Those who were newest to the neighborhood drew a lower number of paths, 4 and 8 respectively, on their maps than the average of other residents who drew 15.33 paths. This could have been due to a lack of familiarity with the overall street system in their neighborhood. Thus, they only knew the most prominent roads that they frequent often well enough to include on their maps. Since this sample size is so small it may have simply been the preference of these participants not to draw out additional streets.

Both of the participants that were newest to the neighborhood included Rainy Street on their maps, even though neither considered Rainy Street in the neighborhood, which indicated a view of the context of their neighborhood in relation to that district. Only one other resident who had lived in the neighborhood for 35 years also choose to include Rainy Street on their map. This

could have been due to the fact that many people who move to East Austin for access to the amenities of being near the urban core, which includes Rainy Street or if they often frequently went to Rainy Street themselves they may have felt a close proximity with it.

Out of the two newer participants, one had 13 friends they have made in the neighborhood and these friends had moved to the neighborhood on average 1-5 years ago. The other new participant's main friends were outside of the neighborhood but all of the people he knew well moved to Austin about 8 years ago. This seemed to indicate that those who were newer to the neighborhood "stuck together" with other new people, which could have been due to the age of the people moving into the neighborhood or similar socioeconomic status as the same people who could afford to move into the neighborhood at the same time which thus led them to do activities together.

No matter how long a participant had lived in the neighborhood, all of them recognized the drastic changes in the neighborhood when I asked them what had changed in the neighborhood recently. The newer participants both noted the upcoming completion of future construction in the neighborhood, which two other longer term residents also noted. The two participants that were newer to the neighborhood showed awareness of the neighborhood changing and had experienced change even within their shorter time living in the neighborhood. The participant who had lived in the neighborhood three years said that

It feels like its constant change. Yeah, I think I feel like businesses are constantly opening and closing all around us like Native Hostel opened right down the street from me and there was a bicycle shop that was right there that closed and a nice little coffee shop. On East Cesar [Chavez Street] businesses [are] constantly opening and closing.

The fact that these two participants who are newer to the neighborhood could notice the rapid change that the longer-term residents were also experiencing shows the pervasiveness of the changes and development that are occurring in East Austin. This rapid pace of change is also evident for people visiting the neighborhood through the construction sites but this change is a stronger part of the sense of place for the residents have their surroundings extremely transformed around them. There will most likely be a point where this rapid change of East Cesar Chavez will stabilize and this new, stable sense of place will emerge. For the present, this state of flux in the neighborhood is key to the sense of place of the neighborhood.

### **Sense of Place in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood**

Overall, the sense of place of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is marked by strong feelings of change due to gentrification. The changes gentrification has brought creates a conflicting sense of place for some people who feel like they are belong in their neighborhood but are also not meant to be there and a sense of loss due to the many changes that have occurred in the neighborhood. The strong community and unmistakable, unique physical features of the neighborhood create a strong sense of place in the neighborhood that the people who live there love. However, since the sense of place has shifted so rapidly in the time these people have lived in their neighborhood, there seems to be a concern that the neighborhood and the sense of place in the neighborhood will continue to change, out of the control of the residents of the neighborhood.

### **Limitations**

This study was extremely limited by the sample of participants. The participants are a biased convenience sample and in no way representative of the entire population of the East

Cesar Chavez neighborhood. I contacted people through the neighborhood association and that is how I got into contact with many participants. Additionally, these participants would connect me with their friends to interview. Therefore, this chain of associations I used to find participants led me to interview four people within a few blocks radius of each other and means that the people I interviewed are not evenly distributed throughout the neighborhood.

Due to this limitation of self-selection bias and the small sample size of the group, this study only gives a glance into a few perspectives of sense of place out of all of the people who live in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. Sense of place is an individualistic phenomenon but with a greater number of interviewees the sense of place for the entire neighborhood could be better understood. Even if the sense of place for everyone in the neighborhood is not understood by this study, the experiences of sense of place of the interviewed participants are still valid and begin to create an understanding of the entire neighborhood's sense of place.

The tools I used for this study are also inherently limited. Maps can be a limiting tool of analysis because the accuracy of the map a person draws is dependent on the effort they put into their map. A person may simply not want to spend a lot of time participating in the study and may simply would like to finish their map quickly. Thus, some of my participants just drew the main features of the neighborhood and were quickly done with the task while others took triple the amount of time. Some participants verbal responses in the interview made it evident that their mental maps were much more rich than their drawn maps. Therefore, some participant-drawn maps are more limited in detail than the conceptions of important features the participants have in their minds.

A limitation of conducting short, one time interviews with people whom I was a stranger to was that participants were less likely to emotionally open up with me. Vulnerability gets at the



truth of people's emotions of experiences in the neighborhood but a person must trust the person they are talking to in order to be vulnerable. Participants may have omitted detailing their personal hardships, deep pains, or losses they may be feeling around their experiences since their trust in me, a stranger, was limited. I do think participants were vulnerable with me about their experiences but longer interviews or multiple meetings with participants may have allowed for more vulnerability and details about their neighborhood experiences that did not come up in these interviews.

Through these interviews I also wanted to see how length of residency affects people's perceptions of their neighborhood. I found that both the newer people to the neighborhood and those who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time were very aware of the rapid changes in the neighborhood. However, the lack of many differences of perception between groups makes it seem like the neighborhood is changing so rapidly that everyone notices the changes and can sense its impacts. A person doesn't have to live in the neighborhood for long to recognize there are changes that are shifting the landscape in front of them. The longer a person lives in the neighborhood, the more drastic these changes seem and a larger sample size of interviewees would help create an understanding of what changes are evident by length of residency.

### **Author's Positionality**

I must acknowledge that who I am as a researcher allowed me to interview people who may not otherwise be willing to talk with me. Since I am an undergraduate student and a female I was much less intimidating to talk to than if I were a male in my 70s with a PhD. Additionally, I am white and this probably led to omissions on direct discussions or mentions of race that possibly would have been brought up if I were Hispanic or African-American. People alter the

stories they tell based on their audience and I imagine that a different researcher would have gathered some differing results from interviews.

While I am from Austin, I consider myself an outsider coming into the community because I did not grow in or close to the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood. I grew up in a predominately white, upper-middle class neighborhood on the northwest side of Austin. Growing up in the nominally same city as people living in East Austin did not give me insight to what it like to live in an area that has rapidly changed as the street I grew up on has experienced minimal change and has had only four houses built or extremely renovated in the past ten years. Due to my differing life experiences of a neighborhood there are topics and areas of discussion or things my interviewers said that I may not fully be able to interpret accurately because I have not lived through similar community experiences or been in close association with these communities for a prolonged period of time.

## **Conclusion**

Considering Montgomery's three factors that create sense of place: image/meaning, activity, physical setting (1998), the sense of place of the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is due to the unique combination of these factors that it has. The neighborhood exists in tension, extremely close proximity the of the neighborhood to the downtown but also the separation it has from downtown. It also has a strong sense of community, both early 1900s and modern architecture, a variety of restaurants, a bar district, and underlying all of this was the continual change of the neighborhood caused by gentrification.

I found that people had feelings of loss due to the many changes that have occurred in the neighborhood from gentrification. This sense of loss contributes to the sense of place because

people are experiencing the effects of changing demographic and socioeconomic environment. Through the interviews it seems that much of the Hispanic community and families are being lost in the neighborhood. Additional loss is felt as older buildings and businesses are replaced by newer ones residents enjoy, but do not seem authentic to the neighborhood. Relph (1976) might argue that the authentic sense of place for people is declining because they don't feel like these building and businesses don't belong. Instead, these places are catering to outsiders of the neighborhood, not to the residents themselves.

Hoelscher and Alderman (2004) discussed the important tie of culture and memory to a place. The rapid transformation of the East Austin landscape can uproot features of the neighborhood that people attach their memories to and are important to people. This was evident in people recalling old neighbors, businesses, and buildings that all no longer exist in the neighborhood. The culture for people who live in East Cesar Chavez seems to be threatened as they have limited control over the changes that keep occurring in the neighborhood.

Using Lynch's work to highlight the strong features of this neighborhood allows for an image of how the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood is perceived at the present moment. This is only a singular snapshot of the neighborhood as the area constantly evolves and will continue to change so will the image of the neighborhood and the sense of place it creates in people minds. However, the inclusion of developments in construction on the maps indicates that the sense of place of the neighborhood includes an awareness of the changing nature of the neighborhood. While work such as Tuan (1977), Relph (1976), and Hoelscher and Alderman (2004) focused on memory and history forming the sense of place in an area, the East Austin neighborhood shows that sense of place may also be dependent on expectations of future features about a place. Future work that allows for repeated studies of mapping to record people's changing perceptions

of a place will allow for an expanded understanding of how gentrification affects people's perceptions of a neighborhood over time.

The participant I interviewed who grew up in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood said that they have enjoyed the improvements to the neighborhood, but thought it would be nice if more people from the original area would be able to actual enjoy these improvements. Instead, these improvements to the neighborhood have contributed to making the neighborhood unaffordable and forcing people to move. Finding ways in which planners, designers, architects, and city official can keep the elements of the urban environment that bring people joy and meaning in their urban environments, allowing for some change, and not displacing people who want to stay in their neighborhood is the balance they should needs to be strived for.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

- How long have you lived in your current location in the neighborhood?
- What is the last big event to happen in your neighborhood?
- Have you ever lived anywhere else in this neighborhood?
- How long have you lived in the neighborhood?
- How long have you lived in Austin?
- Where are your favorite places to go in the neighborhood?
  - What memories do you have of being here?
- Have any places in the neighborhood changed recently?
- Did you go to school nearby or do you have children who go or went to a school nearby?
- Would you walk in your neighborhood at night?
- What makes your neighborhood different from surrounding neighborhoods?
- How do you know you have entered your neighborhood?
- How do you think other people view your neighborhood?
- How many neighbors do you know by name?
- How often do you go over to other people's homes of people who live in the neighborhood?
- Do you have any friends in the neighborhood?
  - Where do your friends live?
  - When did they move to this neighborhood? / How long have they lived here for?

- How often do you get together for dinner/drinks/coffee?
- Do you have any family who live in this neighborhood?
  - If not now, did you in the past?
- Who do you consider to be in your community?
- What is your community like?
- What are the three strongest qualities of the neighborhood?
- Do you feel like you belong in your neighborhood?

## **Author Biography**

Holly Hodge is from Austin, Texas and has lived her whole life in the city. Her family includes an older sister, a younger brother, her parents, and their pet goose, Ryan Gosling, which all live in Austin. She is majoring in Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Urban Studies. She has served on the Polymathic Scholars Panel since her sophomore year, helping planning socials and Friday lunches for her fellow polymaths. She has also been involved in Chi Kappa Phi Service Society, Urban Studies Society, the Blanton Museum of Art, UT's Alternative Breaks program, and is a Peer Academic Coach at the Sanger Learning Center. Through her Polymathic field courses, Holly has grown a love for improving cities. She will graduate in Fall of 2020 and plans to go to graduate school to get a Master's degree in Urban Planning.